

producing trees; and the protection of rare and unique biological features. This management direction is common to all alternatives.

Indicator 1 – Acres of White-tailed Deer Wintering Habitat Allocated to Management Areas Allowing Vegetation Management

The five alternatives provide a range for allocating State-recognized and mapped, potential deer wintering areas to MAs in which vegetation management is allowed at different levels of intensities. The Forest Service manages almost 20,000 acres of these deer yards on the GMNF (Table 3.6-7).

Effects Common to All Alternatives

Forest-wide management direction for deer wintering habitat, in the form of standards and guidelines, is designed to maximize improvements to deer wintering areas while minimizing adverse impacts to other wildlife using these wintering areas. These standards and guidelines address silvicultural practices that enhance the quality of cover and browse, as well as management to minimize potential disturbance from human activities such as trails use, other recreation, or other activities. This management direction applies to all alternatives.

Alternative A

Alternative A proposes the least acreage of deer wintering areas in which vegetation management is permitted (Table 3.6-7: 12,661 acres, 63% of deer wintering area acres on the GMNF). Alternative A thus affords the least opportunity to maintain or enhance deer wintering areas. Deer wintering areas in many of the MAs that prohibit vegetation management (such as Wilderness, Remote Backcountry, and various special areas) tend to be centrally located, in more remote and relatively higher elevations of the GMNF. Deer wintering habitat in higher (and colder) elevations may be occupied less frequently or by fewer deer than those at lower elevations.

More than 2,200 acres of deer wintering areas are included in Newly Acquired Land in Alternative A. Management direction for Newly Acquired Land allows maintenance of existing permanent upland openings, but does not permit vegetation management for habitat improvement, nor does it allow relocation of trails. Standards and guidelines for deer wintering areas specifically direct that trails avoid or be relocated out of deer wintering habitat. Consequently, management options for existing cross-country ski and snowmobile activity in deer wintering areas in Newly Acquired Land are closure of the trails or continued use without re-routing or re-structuring trails. Trail closure can cause disruption of the trail system; continued use can drive deer out of an occupied wintering area.

Deer wintering areas in Newly Acquired Land are distributed across the Forest, not necessarily located in central, more remote areas typical of the other MAs in which vegetation management is prohibited. Thus, Alternative A includes a greater likelihood than the other alternatives of removing “preferred” deer yards from active vegetation management.

For these reasons, Alternative A least serves the interest of well-distributed and well-maintained deer wintering areas on the GMNF.

Alternatives B, C, D, and E

Alternative B proposes the most acreage of deer wintering areas in MAs where vegetation management is permitted (Table 3.6-7: 14,421 acres, 72%). Alternatives C, D, and E are similar to each other, proposing more acres in these MAs than in Alternative A, but fewer than in Alternative B: range from 13,426 acres (67%) to 13,823 acres (69%).

The maximal difference in manageable deer wintering areas (1,760 acres) is between Alternatives A and B. The total number of acres may represent a negligible difference on a Forest-wide scale. A measurable difference is in the distribution of wintering areas removed from management. Deer wintering areas excluded from vegetation management in Alternatives B through E tend to be centrally located, remote, and at relatively higher elevations of the GMNF.